

**Abstract 498**

**TITLE:** Factors for Delaying or Not Testing for HIV Among At-Risk Populations in the United States: Results from the HIV Testing Survey

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**BACKGROUND:** Education and counseling programs promote risk recognition and HIV testing for persons in high-risk groups. However, many persons delay HIV testing or do not get tested at all. The HIV Testing Survey assessed HIV testing behavior, including factors for delaying or not being tested, and perceptions about HIV testing, in recognized risk groups.

**METHODS:** Anonymous interviews were conducted in nine states, among 2369 HIV-negative or untested persons at risk for HIV: 748 men who had sex with men (MSM) recruited at gay bars; 770 street-recruited injection drug users (IDU); and 851 heterosexuals (HET) recruited at sexually transmitted disease clinics. In a structured interview, participants were asked whether any of 17 factors were reasons they had delayed testing or had not been tested, and among these, the main factor.

**RESULTS:** Of 2369 persons interviewed, 1808 (76%) had been tested for HIV, and 561 (24%) had not been tested. Overall, 1968 (83%) cited at least one factor for delaying (D) testing or not (N) being tested. The main factors were: afraid to find out (D = 29%; N = 28%); thought HIV-negative (D = 13%; N = 15%); didn't think at risk (D = 11%; N = 20%); and didn't want to think about being HIV-positive (D = 10%; N = 9%). Concern that their name would be reported to the government was infrequently cited as the main factor (D = 2%; N = 2%). HET clients had been less frequently tested (68%), compared with MSM (80%) and IDU (82%). However, the main reasons for not being tested were generally similar across these groups. Compared with tested persons, untested persons were more likely to have negative perceptions about HIV. Untested persons were significantly less likely to talk with partners, family or friends if they learned they were HIV positive; believe that medical care for persons with HIV is effective; or to have friends who had been HIV-tested or considered HIV testing important.

**CONCLUSION:** Among persons in high-risk groups, the most common reasons for delaying or not being tested were fear of being HIV-positive and lack of recognition of their risk for HIV. Although HIV prevention programs have routinely addressed these issues, they continue to be significant barriers to successful national HIV prevention programs. Furthermore, untested at-risk persons may be less likely to respond to current prevention messages. These data should assist in the formation and evaluation of revised strategies to promote risk recognition, knowledge of HIV antibody status, and sustained behavioral risk reduction.

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